

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 13, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We ask you to take corrective action and bring an end to the suffering of thousands of severely ill veterans exposed to Agent Orange during their service in Vietnam. Veterans suffering from bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, parkinsonism, and hypertension because of their Agent Orange exposure are unable to access disability or health care benefits from VA, despite scientific and medical support to add these diseases to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) presumptive list for service connection based on Agent Orange exposure. Your Administration has the ability to add these conditions to the presumptive list and provide lifesaving benefits to more than 190,000 veterans. Without your action, tens of thousands of sick and aging veterans will continue to go without VA resources and health care in their time of need.

As you know, the National Academies of Medicine (NAM) publish updated reports comprehensively evaluating scientific and medical information about the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides during the Vietnam War. The research supports inclusion of these veterans on VA's regulatory list of diseases associated with Agent Orange. NAM's March 10, 2016 report, found that hypothyroidism and bladder cancer have "limited or suggestive evidence of an association" to Agent Orange exposure. The same report expanded the definition of Parkinson's disease, which was in the "limited or suggestive evidence of an association" category, to include Parkinson-like symptoms or parkinsonism. NAM's November 15, 2018, report showed "sufficient evidence of an association" for hypertension to Agent Orange. The use of "limited or suggestive evidence of an association" has been the precedent sufficient for VA to grant presumptive authority for other conditions, and there has never been a condition in the "sufficient evidence of an association" category which was not included on VA's presumptive list. We are concerned that the Administration is changing established precedent and forcing veterans with these health conditions to meet a different, more stringent standard. We must do better for these veterans.

We also believe these veterans deserve to know why the Administration has made no decision on this matter or provided a timeline for action. Recent reporting confirmed that former VA Secretary David Shulkin requested the White House add the new health conditions to the presumptive list, but his proposal was blocked by the White House and the Office of Management and Budget due to costs. Costs should not inhibit the Administration from doing what is right for veterans when both precedent and research support their claims. We encourage you to acknowledge the science-based evidence and the recommendation of former VA

Secretary David Shulkin and designate these conditions to the presumptive list of diseases for Agent Orange exposure. The United States cannot ask that men and women fight in defense of our country and then abandon them when they return injured and ill. To care for these veterans is a true cost of war.

Finally, we understand VA's current Secretary Wilkie suggested he cannot endorse addition of these conditions to the presumptive list of herbicide-related diseases without waiting another year to review two forthcoming scientific reports. His excuse inexplicably presumes these reports, focusing on general mortality rates of Vietnam-era veterans, will provide more conclusive evidence than the NAM reports which carefully considered these specific diseases and their association to toxic herbicides. We disagree with his choice to delay further and believe a well-supported decision can, and should, be made today.

Mr. President, with your help, we can live up to the promises made to thousands of veterans currently living with and dying from the diseases they developed as a result of their service to our country. Previous Administrations recognized the invaluable benefit in caring for these men and women, no matter the cost. We encourage you to end the wait and begin providing lifesaving support today.

Sincerely,



Mark Takano  
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House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Conor Lamb  
Vice Chair  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Chris Pappas  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Elaine G. Luria  
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House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Julia Brownley  
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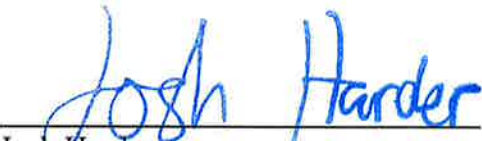
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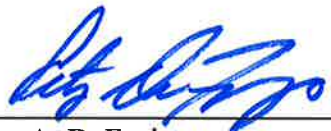
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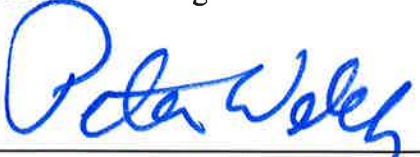
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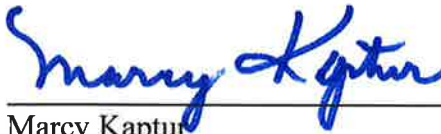
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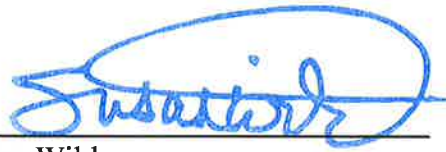
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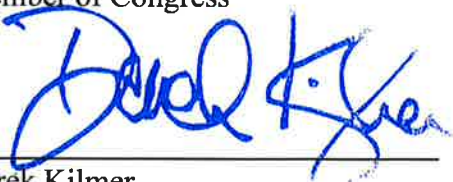
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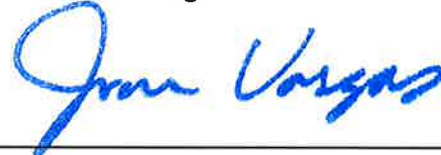
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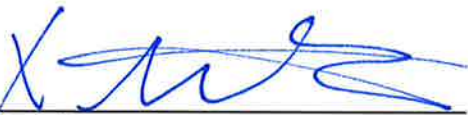
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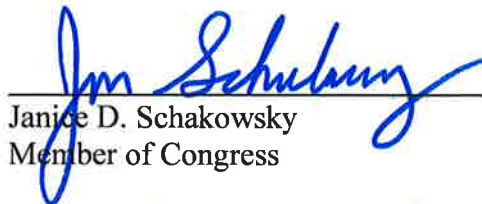
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February 13, 2020

Page 8



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